

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASH DC 4967

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL ANTWERP

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PDIP, PINT, FR, BE

SUBJECT: MICHEL VARVOUX, NEW FRENCH CONSUL GENERAL
IN ANTWERP

1. MICHEL VARNOUX, COUNSELOR FIRST CLASS IN THE FRENCH FOREIGN SERVICE, HAS BEEN POSTED AS CONSUL GENERAL IN ANTWERP EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, AFTER 20 YEARS IN THE FRENCH DELEGATION TO THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE (COCOM). A SEPTEL DEALS BRIEFLY WITH THE CHANGE AND HIS REPLACEMENT IN THE LATTER JOB.

2. ANTWERP WILL FIND VARNOUX AN INTERESTING, IF SOMEWHAT POMPOUS AND FLAMBOYANT, COLLEAGUE. AFTER WARTIME SERVICE IN THE RESISTANCE AND FFI, VARNOUX JOINED THE FOREIGN SERVICE IN APRIL 1945 AND THEN SERVED AS VICE CONSUL IN LOS ANGELES UNTIL 1948. LATER SERVICE ABROAD WAS IN KARACHI AND DAMASCUS, BUT SINCE JUNE 1954 HE HAS BEEN AT THE QUAI, DEALING WITH STRATEGIC EXPORT CONTROLS, FIRST AS DEPUTY DELEGATE, AND SINCE JANUARY 1959, AS DELEGATE OF FRANCE TO COCOM. HE HAS BEEN FOR MANY YEARS DE FACTO "DEAN" OF THE COCOM DELEGATES (THE GREEK DELEGATE'S TENURE DATES FROM 1956, BUT IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE HE TOOK AN ACTIVE PART IN THE COMMITTEE'S WORK); VARNOUX DID NOT ENJOY BEING REMINDED

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THAT HIS PROTOCOL STATUS WAS NOT DE JURE.

3. VARNOUX COMES FROM THE PETTY ARISTOCRACY AND APPARENTLY HAS SOME PRIVATE MEANS. WHILE IN THE STATES HE MADE ANUMBER OF INVESTMENTS AND DEPOSITS AND SO BEMOANS FROM TIME TO TIME THE SMITHSONIAN DEVALUATION AND THE FALL IN AMERICAN STOCK PRICES. EXPECTABLY, HIS POLITICAL LEANINGS SEEM CENTRIST RATHER THAN GAULLIST, BUT HE HAS GIVEN NO INDICATIONS THAT HE IS A MEMBER OF ANY POLITICAL PARTY. IN THE HIGHLY TECHNICAL ATMOSPHERE OF COCOM AFFAIRS, HE OFTEN GAVE THE IMPRESSION OF NOT HAVING BOTHERED TO READ HIS BRIEF AND A 1960 REPORT IN THE EMBASSY'S BIO FILES DESCRIBED HIM AS "DIFFICULT, IRRITATING AND UNREASONABLE IN DEBATE". THAT REPORT PREDATES THE 1966 EXPULSION OF NATO FROM FRANCE, AND SO APPARENTLY REFLECTS HIS OWN, RATHER THAN HIS GOVERNMENT'S PREDELICIONS. THE PRESENT US DELEGATION CAN SUBSCRIBE TO THE EARLIER DESCRIPTION. LATELY, HE HAS EXPRESSED A PERSONAL DISQUIET WITH GOF POLICIES AS THEY RELATE TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND OIL BUT HE NEVERTHELESS REMAINED A RELATIVELY EFFECTIVE COCOM SPOKESMAN FOR HIS GOVERNMENT. AS WITH MANY FRENCHMEN, HE ENJOYS A DIG NOW AND AGAIN AT US POLICIES, BUT TRIES TO BE CHARMING ON A ONE-TO-ONE BASIS.

4. VARNOUX, WHO WILL BE 60 IN APRIL, IS A CONFIRMED BACHELOR, WHOSE MOST SERIOUS FAMILIAL CRISIS SEEMED TO COME ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO WHEN HIS 14-YEAR OLD DACHSHUND

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HAD TO BE DESTROYED. HE IS AN INVETERATE NAME-DROPPER. HE IS CAREFUL OF HIS HEALTH, AND TAKES A THERMAL "CURE" EACH SUMMER AT ONE OF THE FRENCH SPAS. WHETHER HE WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE THIS IN HIS NEW ASSIGNMENT REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

5. VARNOUX'S ENGLISH IS QUITE GOOD (PERHAPS 3 PLUS OR SO), BUT NOT AS GOOD AS ONE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED FROM THE FACT OF HIS SERVICE IN LOS ANGELES AND TWENTY YEARS OF WEEKLY PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS IN WHICH ONE OF THE TWO WORKING LANGUAGES WAS ENGLISH. WHILE HIS GOVERNMENT'S INSISTENCE ON THE USE OF FRENCH IN SUCH INTERNATIONAL FORA AS COCOM OBVIOUSLY PLAYED A ROLE, HIS INTERVENTIONS IN THE COMMITTEE WERE ALMOST ALWAYS IN FRENCH, EVEN AT TIMES WHEN THE CONSEQUENT DELAY TO ALLOW FOR INTERPRETATION MADE THE MEETING DRAG ON TO THE ANNOYANCE OF OTHER DELEGATIONS. FORTUNATELY, DURING THE CURRENT COCOM LIST REVIEW SESSIONS HE HAS NOT INSISTED ON INTERPRETATION FROM ENGLISH TO FRENCH WHEN OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FRENCH DELEGATION COULD COPE AS WELL.

6. OBVIOUSLY, FOREGOING VERY FRANK ASSESSMENT SHOULD REMAIN IN CONFIDENCE.

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